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ABSTRACT

Americans want increased federal involvement in their local schools, but they are hesitant about federal control of the classroom. A special CBS News poll, conducted among a nationwide random sample of 1,107 adults (347 of which currently have children in school) by telephone between May 30 and June 2, 1990, indicated a significant division on whether the local or the Federal Government should control the curriculum. While parents with children in school are more willing than the general public to have increased federal participation, two-thirds of those surveyed believed that individual teachers or the local school board should determine how classes are taught. According to the American public, not only are teachers paid too little, but they also do not receive enough respect. Americans are divided on how teachers today compare with the teachers of their youth: nearly the same numbers say teachers today are better than they used to be as say they are the same or worse. Most parents interviewed in this poll reported some real contact with their children's books, teachers, or homework. Practically all the parents had examined their children's text books with most indicating that they are generally fairly good. Included are the 36 poll questions and the percentages of responses received. (KM)

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**AMERICA'S TOUGHEST ASSIGNMENT:
SOLVING THE EDUCATION CRISIS**

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**AMERICA'S TOUGHEST ASSIGNMENT:
SOLVING THE EDUCATION CRISIS**

Education is something people learn about not from the media but from their own personal experience as parents, as teachers, or as taxpayers. Drugs, wars and economic problems dominate the headlines, and only 8% spontaneously name education when asked what are the top three problems facing the country today. But when they do think about education, Americans see it as important, and something America is not doing as well as it can. In fact, they say Japan, not the U.S., does the best job of educating children.

Signs of dissatisfaction range from the community school to the Oval Office, and money is a key element in solving the country's toughest assignment. A large majority favors increased spending on education, and many are willing to pay more taxes themselves. Nearly three-quarters say they would pay more in taxes for education if the money were used in their own community; nearly half would pay more in taxes even if their own community received none of the extra tax dollars. Willingness to pay more is even higher among those with children now in school.

But Americans want a lot in return. Most want schools to respond to the modern problems of drugs, poverty and hunger. Many believe teachers can improve the system. When asked what single change would improve education in the U.S., Americans focus on better and better-paid teachers.

George Bush, who in 1988 said he wanted to be the nation's "Education President," has yet to make the public believe he has accomplished that goal. Only 8% said he had made progress. Three-quarters said all he had done so far is talk. Yet there is hope -- half say they trust him to make the right decisions.

This special CBS NEWS poll was conducted among a nation-wide random sample of 1,107 adults, interviewed by telephone May 30 - June 2, 1990, for use in the CBS NEWS Special Report, "America's Toughest Assignment: Solving the Education Crisis" which will be broadcast Thursday, September 6, 1990. The error due to sampling could be plus or minus three percentage points for results based on the entire sample, and plus or minus five percentage points for results based on the 347 adults interviewed who currently have grade and high school aged children. This release conforms to the Standards of Disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

THE SYSTEM

When asked which country does the best job of educating children, twice as many Americans say Japan as say the U.S. does. 39% think the Japanese are the best educators, and only 18% think Americans do a better job. (Americans are more willing to praise the Japanese than they are to adopt their system -- they oppose a longer school year, and more hours a day in school.)

On a local level, 15% say their own community's schools are excellent, and most say they are at least good. But there are differences depending more on where people live than on who they are. Americans think suburban and rural schools are generally better than urban ones.

SCHOOLS IN COMMUNITY ARE..	TOTAL	BIG CITIES	SUBURBS	RURAL
EXCELLENT	15%	7%	19%	15%
GOOD	45	33	45	50
FAIR	27	35	25	23
POOR	6	18	3	4

Americans have noticed some improvement in the system. More people say children today are getting a better education than they did than say the good old days were better. For most, their grade and high school education was acceptable, but not the best. Only a third say their own schooling prepared them very well for what they did later. (Those with college degrees were most happy about their education; surprisingly, family income had little effect on how one evaluates their own education.)

COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

The schools can't escape from one problem that faces all communities -- drugs. At the time of this survey, (which predated the Persian Gulf crisis) 45% named drugs as one of the biggest problems facing the country; 23% cited it (along with alcohol) as the biggest problem their own local schools have to deal with. No part of the country escapes the drug problem -- it touches those in rural America as much as in urban America.

The schools also have to cope with a lack of money, overcrowding and the lack of discipline. One in ten cite the problem of keeping good teachers or other teacher-related problems. In Western states, overcrowding is often cited.

Americans want their local schools to solve these and other problems. They want the schools to add to their basic goals and make sure children found using drugs get treatment (76% favor), emotionally disturbed children receive special attention (88%), young children get proper nutrition (79%), and students learn to be good citizens (93%). Half think the schools should provide after-school care for young children with working parents. That view is shared by those with and without school-aged children.

FIXING THE SCHOOLS

Americans want increased federal involvement in their local schools, but they are hesitant about federal control of the classroom. There is significant division on whether the local or the federal government should set curriculum. Two in five say each community should set in own standards and curriculum, two in five think the national government should set one standard. Parents now with children in school are more willing than the public overall to have increased federal participation.

One way to ensure that would be the appointment of an Education Czar, much like the Drug Czar, to oversee all aspects of the educational system. A majority thought that was a good idea.

Americans clearly would like to keep control of classroom details at the local level, however. Two-thirds say how classes are taught should be determined by individual teachers or by the local school board, with teachers named most frequently.

There are no indications that Americans are willing to take any radical steps to fix the school system, however. More education may not be better education. Only a fifth favor longer school days. Only 30% favor an extended school year.

Most people think two non-traditional approaches to education won't help the education of students. In fact, the public thinks they would hurt. 64% say eliminating grades would hurt. 61% say devoting an entire day to only one subject would hurt. Two old standbys -- more homework, and more tests, are viewed as potentially helping. Harder tests, however, get mixed reviews. As for the single best cure for the educational system, Americans say better-paid and generally better teachers would do the trick.

THE TEACHERS

Teachers suffer from the Rodney Dangerfield syndrome. According to the American public, not only don't teachers earn enough, but they may not get enough respect. Only a third say most people in their community have a great deal of respect for teachers. Almost as many think teachers don't get much respect at all.

Young adults and people who live in big cities are most struck by the teachers' plight. Overall, 55% say teachers are paid too little. In large cities, 62% say that, and for those under 30, whose contact with teachers as students is most recent, 71% say teachers aren't paid enough. Those same groups are most likely to say teachers get little or no respect.

Americans focus on teachers because for most of them, a teacher mattered in their own educational careers. 61% say they had one elementary or high school teacher who made a difference in their own life -- usually because that teacher gave them individual attention. Those under 30, and those in big cities, the same

groups that are most likely to say teachers are not appreciated, are most likely to report that one particular teacher made a difference in their lives. And Americans trust teacher evaluations more than they do either grades or test scores to measure a child's progress.

Yet teaching is not a highly desirable profession -- only 6% name it first as the occupation they would choose for their child. Americans still want their children to be doctors first, with lawyers and computer programmers the next top choices. Only 1% of urban residents say they would choose teaching first as a career for their children.

But despite the problems of low salary and lack of respect, becoming a teacher doesn't necessarily mean picking a rotten apple of a career. In fact, three out of five say they'd think their child had made a good choice if he or she chose to be a teacher. 13% would think their child made a poor choice.

Americans are divided on how teachers today compare with the teachers of their youth. Nearly the same numbers say teachers today are better than they used to be as say they are the same or worse.

Perception of teachers appears to have a lot to do with the way Americans evaluate their community's educational system. Overall, only 15% say the educational system in their own community is excellent, but a quarter of those who think teachers today are better than they used to be think so. Nationally, only a third view their local schools as only fair or poor, but nearly half of those who think the quality of teachers has declined say their local school systems are only fair or poor.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The parents interviewed in this poll reported on their involvement with their own children's education. Most reported some real contact with their children's books, teachers, or homework. Nearly all have examined their children's textbooks; those who have say they're generally pretty good. Three-quarters spend at least some time every week with their children on homework.

61% say they know the names of their children's teachers; 25% say they've talked with a teacher at their child's school within the past week; 12% say they've invited one of them home for dinner at least once. That's more common in the suburbs and in the countryside than in the big city. And 41% say they would be willing to run for their local school board.

CBS NEWS EDUCATION POLL
May 30 - June 2, 1990

1. What do you think are the most important problems facing this country today? (ACCEPT UP TO 3 ANSWERS) Anything else?

	<u>TOTAL*</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL*</u>
DRUGS	45%	46%
HOMELESSNESS	16	14
ENVIRONMENT	13	13
BUDGET DEFICIT	12	13
ECONOMY	11	11
CRIME	10	10
UNEMPLOYMENT	9	9
EDUCATION	8	10
GOVERNMENT	6	5
HIGH TAXES	5	5
AIDS	5	3
POVERTY	5	8
RACISM	5	2
MORALITY	5	5
WAR/PEACE	4	3
OTHER	33	38
DK/NA	7	6

*Percentages add to more than 100% because respondents were allowed to give more than one response.

2. Imagine you had a child now finishing high school. If you could decide what kind of career your child would have, what would you want your child to become?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
WHATEVER THEY WANT	26½	26½
DOCTOR	18	21
ENGINEER/SCIENTIST	8	6
LAWYER	7	8
COMPUTER PROGRAMMER	7	8
TEACHER/PROFESSOR	6	6
BUSINESSPERSON	5	5
OTHER	14	15
DK/NA	9	5

A. (IF ANYTHING BUT "TEACHER")
What if your child chose to become a schoolteacher? Would you think that was a good choice of career, or a poor choice of career, or wouldn't you feel one way or the other about it?

GOOD CHOICE	62½	61½
POOR CHOICE	13	10
NEITHER WAY	17	19
DK/NA	4	6

3. Should federal spending on education be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
INCREASED	69%	74%
DECREASED	5	4
KEPT THE SAME	19	19
DK/NA	7	3

4. Would you be willing to pay \$100 a year more in taxes if all the money were used to help pay for schools in your community, or not?

WILLING	71%	77%
NOT WILLING	24	18
DK/NA	5	5

5. George Bush has said he wants to be the Education President. So far, has George Bush really made progress in improving education, or has he mainly just talked about it?

MADE PROGRESS	8%	12%
JUST TALKED ABOUT IT	72	70
DK/NA	20	18

6. Do you trust George Bush to make the right decisions about education, or not?

YES	50%	50%
NO	31	34
DK/NA	19	16

7. Which country in the world do you think does the best job of educating children?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
JAPAN	39%	40%
UNITED STATES	18	18
CHINA	4	6
GREAT BRITAIN	3	4
GERMANY	3	4
OTHER	10	8
DK/NA	23	20

8. What single change do you think would bring about the greatest improvement in this country's educational system?

BETTER TEACHERS	14%	14%
INCREASE TEACHER'S PAY	10	11
OTHER TEACHER RELATED	4	4
MORE FUNDS	6	7
MORE DISCIPLINE	5	6
IMPROVE CURRICULUM	5	6
BACK TO BASICS	4	5
PARENTAL CONCERN	4	4
STUDENT MOTIVATION	3	3
MISCELLANEOUS	18	20
DK/NA	27	20

9. In your community, what do you think is the most important problem the public schools must deal with?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
USE OF DRUGS/ALCOHOL	23½	23½
LACK OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT	9	14
OVERCROWDING	6	8
LACK OF DISCIPLINE	6	8
KEEPING GOOD TEACHERS	5	4
OTHER TEACHER RELATED	4	3
CHILDREN'S LACK OF INTEREST	4	6
DROP OUTS	3	3
OTHER	24	22
DK/NA	16	9

10. In general, do you think each community should set its own educational standards and curriculum, or should the national government set one standard for all communities?

LOCAL	39½	36½
NATIONAL	45	49
DEPENDS (VOL)	9	9
DK/NA	7	6

11. In your community, do you think teachers are paid too little, too much, or about the right amount?

TOO LITTLE	55½	59½
TOO MUCH	4	7
RIGHT AMOUNT	27	25
DK/NA	14	9

12. How much respect do you think most people in your community have for teachers - a great deal, some, or not much?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
A GREAT DEAL	31½	35½
SOME	41	42
NOT MUCH	24	22
DK/NA	4	1

13. Compared to when you went to school, are teachers today better, worse, or about as good as teachers were then?

BETTER	27½	29½
WORSE	28	31
AS GOOD AS	33	35
DK/NA	12	5

14. Here are some functions that elementary and high schools could take on in addition to teaching basic skills. For each, please tell me if you think it is something that the schools should add to their basic responsibilities, or is it something that schools really should not be involved in.

Is.....something schools should or should not add to their basic responsibilities?

a. making sure that children found using drugs get treatment

SHOULD	76½	77½
SHOULD NOT	18	16
DEPENDS (VOL)	4	4
DK/NA	2	3

b. seeing to it that emotionally disturbed children receive special attention	PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL	
	<u>TOTAL</u>	
SHOULD	88½	85½
SHOULD NOT	9	12
DEPENDS (VOL)	2	2
DK/NA	1	1
c. insuring that young children receive the proper nutrition		
SHOULD	79½	78½
SHOULD NOT	16	17
DEPENDS (VOL)	3	3
DK/NA	2	2
d. teaching students how to be good citizens		
SHOULD	93½	92½
SHOULD NOT	4	6
DEPENDS (VOL)	1	1
DK/NA	2	1
e. providing after-school care for young children with working parents		
SHOULD	50½	51½
SHOULD NOT	39	36
DEPENDS (VOL)	6	7
DK/NA	5	6

15. In some communities in the U.S., many children cannot speak English when they enter school. What do you think the school's responsibility is in these communities -- should they teach elementary school students in their native language only, should they start teaching in the native language and switch to English after a year or so, or should all instruction be in the English language?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
NATIVE LANGUAGE ONLY	3%	3%
ENGLISH AFTER A YEAR	40	43
ENGLISH ONLY	51	48
DK/NA	6	6

16. When you were in school, was there any one particular teacher who made a difference in your life?

YES	61%	62%
NO	38	37
DK/NA	1	1

a. (IF YES) What was it about that teacher that made a difference?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
CONCERN FOR STUDENTS	15%	15%
INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION	10	10
DEVELOPED MY POTENTIAL	8	8
EFFECTIVE TEACHER	6	5
DISCIPLINE/STRICTNESS	4	4
MADE LEARNING INTERESTING	3	4
DEVOTED	3	3
OTHER	11	12
DK/NA	1	1

17. How would you rate the public elementary and high schools in your own community? Would you say they are excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

EXCELLENT	15%	20%
GOOD	45	45
FAIR	27	28
POOR	6	5
DK/NA	7	2

18. How well do you think your own elementary and high school education prepared you for what you did later - very well, well enough, or not well at all?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
VERY WELL	33%	34%
WELL ENOUGH	49	49
NOT WELL AT ALL	16	17
DK/NA	2	--

19. Do you think the education children receive today is better, worse, or about the same as the education you received?

BETTER	41%	46%
WORSE	27	25
ABOUT THE SAME	27	27
DK/NA	5	2

20. Think about the number of hours children are in school every day. Do you think the schools should be open more hours, fewer hours, or is the number of hours in the school day about right?

OPEN MORE HOURS	21%	19%
FEWER HOURS	3	3
ABOUT RIGHT	73	77
DK/NA	2	1

21. What about the number of days in a school year? Should children today spend more days a year, fewer days a year, or is the number of days in the school year about right?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
MORE DAYS A YEAR	30%	30%
FEWER DAYS A YEAR	3	3
RIGHT AMOUNT	66	66
DK/NA	1	1

22. Should the federal government be more involved with the schools in your community than it is now, or less involved?

MORE INVOLVED	52%	56%
LESS INVOLVED	26	24
ABOUT THE SAME (VOL)	10	10
DK/NA	12	10

23. Would you be willing to pay \$100 a year more in taxes if all the money were used to help pay for schools in other communities?

WILLING	49%	56%
NOT WILLING	45	40
DK/NA	6	4

24. We have a Drug Czar in Washington who oversees the anti-drug program in this country. Do you think there should be an Education Czar, someone appointed at the national level to oversee all aspects of the educational system, or don't you think that's necessary?

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
SHOULD BE CZAR	54%	59%
NOT NECESSARY	37	35
DK/NA	9	6

25. Who should have the most say in deciding what subjects will be taught in public schools: the federal government, the state government, teachers, local school boards, or parent groups? [PROBE: Who should have the most say?]

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	15%	20%
STATE GOVERNMENT	21	20
TEACHERS	15	18
LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS	20	18
PARENT GROUPS	20	16
DK/NA	9	8

26. Who should have the most say in deciding how classes are taught: the federal government, the state government, teachers, local school boards, or parent groups? [PROBE: Who should have the most say?]

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	7½	9½
STATE GOVERNMENT	18	20
TEACHERS	32	30
LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS	24	26
PARENT GROUPS	12	11
DK/NA	7	4

27. What is the best way to tell how well a child is doing in school -- grades, test scores, or evaluations by the teacher?

GRADES	18½	16½
TEST SCORES	18	23
TEACHER EVALUATIONS	58	55
DK/NA	6	6

28. I'm going to name some changes that have been proposed for some schools. For each, tell me if you think it would help or hurt the education of students, or wouldn't it make much difference?

Would.....help, hurt or make no difference?

TOTAL **PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL**

a. eliminating grades

HELP	13%	15%
HURT	64	65
NO DIFFERENCE	18	17
DK/NA	5	3

b. harder tests

HELP	37%	35%
HURT	30	30
NO DIFFERENCE	25	29
DK/NA	8	6

c. longer school days

HELP	28%	25%
HURT	45	52
NO DIFFERENCE	24	23
DK/NA	3	--

d. devoting an entire day to
only one subject

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL</u>
HELP	22½	20½
HURT	61	65
NO DIFFERENCE	11	12
DK/NA	5	3

e. more homework

HELP	48½	50½
HURT	24	25
NO DIFFERENCE	22	23
DK/NA	6	2

f. more tests

HELP	52½	52½
HURT	16	17
NO DIFFERENCE	25	28
DK/NA	7	3

29. Do you have children now
attending elementary or high
schools?

YES	31½
NO	69
DK/NA	--

ASKED OF ALL RESPONDENTS WITH CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

30. Do they attend public schools,
parochial schools, or private
schools?

	<u>TOTAL</u>
PUBLIC SCHOOLS	90%
PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS	4
PRIVATE SCHOOLS	5
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE	1
PUBLIC AND PAROCHIAL	--
PRIVATE AND PAROCHIAL	--
PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND PAROCHIAL	--
DK/NA	--

31. Do you know the names of your
children's teachers?

YES	61%
NO	25
SOME (VOL.)	14
DK/NA	--

32. When was the last time you visited your child's school and talked with a teacher?

	<u>TOTAL</u>
NEVER	84
TODAY/EVERY DAY	8
IN THE LAST WEEK	17
IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS	11
IN THE PAST MONTH	24
IN THE PAST 3 MONTHS	21
IN THE PAST SCHOOL YEAR	11
DK/NA	--

33. Have you ever invited any of your children's teachers to your home for dinner?

YES	124
NO	88
DK/NA	--

34. How many hours a week do you spend with your children on homework?

NONE	234
LESS THAN TWO	20
TWO TO FOUR	27
OVER FOUR/UNDER SIX	11
SIX TO EIGHT	7
OVER EIGHT/UNDER TEN	3
TEN OR MORE	9
DK/NA	--

35. Have you looked at any of the textbooks your child is currently using in school?

	<u>TOTAL</u>
YES	90%
NO	9
DK/NA	1

a. (IF YES) How would you rate the quality of the textbooks--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

EXCELLENT	20%
GOOD	57
FAIR	12
POOR	1
DK/NA	--

36. Would you be willing to run for your local school board?

YES	41%
NO	58
DK/NA	1

TOTAL ADULTS	1,107
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TOTAL PEOPLE WITH KIDS IN SCHOOL	341
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